

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY ROME

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TRIESTE 0060

E.O.: 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IT

SUBJ: THE DC STRONGHOLDS: THE VENETO AND

FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIAN

1. SUMMARY. THE VENETO AND FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA REGOINS PRODUCED NEARLY TWO MILLION OF THE DC'S 14 MILLION VOTES IN THE 1976 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. HERE THE DC IS STILL THE BOSS BUT ITS GRIP ON THINGS IS NOT WHAT IT ONCE WAS AND THE QUESTION IS WHETHER DC CAN HANGE ON AND FOR HOW LONG. NEVERTHELESS, THE TWO REGIONS REMAIN MAJOR OBSTACLES TO PCI ASPIRATIONS TO PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL GOVERMENT. IT IS HERE AFTER ALL THAT THE PCI MUST SHOW THAT IT CAN APPEAL BEYOND NARROW PARTY LINES AND THE ANTI-DC VOTE, AND FOR THAT REASON, THE OUTCOME IN NORTHEAST ITALY WILL BE A MAJOR DETERMINANT

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OF THE COMMUNISTS' FUTURE ROLE IN ITALY. AS FOR THE DC, IF IT CANNOT DO THE NECESSARY IN AN AREA IT ALREADY DOMINATES. ITS HOPES ARE SLIM INDEED TO ASPIRE TO BE THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE. MOST REGIONAL DC LEADERS, DESPITE FACTIONAL DIFFERENCES, AGREE ON THE POINT: U.S. ATTITUDES HAVE AN ENORMOUS IMPORTANCE IN THE ITALIAN SCHEME OF THINGS AND FOR THE U.S. TO APPEAR TO BE INDIFFERENT TO POLITICAL

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DEVELOPMENTS IN ITALY IS TO INVITE POSSIBLE OUTCOMES INITIAL TO UNITED STATES INTERESTS. FROM NORTHEAST ITALY AT LEAST, DC LEADERS ARE WATCHING AND WAITING FOR ANY SIGNS OF A POSSIBLE SHIFT IN U.S. POLICY REGARDING THE ISSUE OF PCI PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT. TO IDENTIFY THE U.S. WITH THE DC IN THESE TWO KEY REGIONS, FRIULI DC REGIONAL SECRETARY COLONI HAS VIGOROUSLY URGED THAT AMBASSADOR GARDNER'S

FIRST VISIT OUTSIDE ROME BE TO THE FRIULI (AND THEN THE VENETO). END SUMMARY.

2. THE NORTHEAST IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF THE MOST POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY STABLE AREAS IN ITALY. IT EMBRACES 11 OF ITALY'S 93 PROVINCES AND ACCOUNTS FOR ABOUT 10 PCT OF THE COUNTRY'S AREA, POPULATION, AND GNP.

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ABUTTING ON TWO OF ITALY'S MOST SENSITIVE BORDERS IT IS STRATEGIC REAL ESTATE HOSTING UPWARDS TO 1/3 OF THE ITALIAN ARMY LED BY ELITE UNITS AND ABLE OFFICERS AND COMMANDED BY A THREE-STAR GENERAL. INTERNAL ORDER ON THE NORTHEAST IS LOOKED AFTER BY ONE OF ITALY'S FEW CARABINIERI GENERALS.

3. HERE THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (DC) IS STILL THE DOMINANT POLITICAL FORCE BUT THE QUESTION IS FOR HOW LONG AS THE COMMUNISTS CONTINUE TO PRESS HARD (TRIESTE 0021). OF THE DC'S 14 MILLION VOTES IN THE 1976 CHAMBER ELECTIONS, THE VENETO AND FRIULI PRODUCED ALMOST TWO MILLION OF THEM (13.7 PCT). AS COMPARED TO THE 1972 PERFORMANCE, THE DC UPPED ITS VOTE COUNT BY SIX PCT IN THE VENETO AND A BIT MORE THAN SEVEN IN THE FRIULI. OUT OF THE TWO REGIONS' TOTAL OF 59 DEPUTIES AND 31 SENATORS, THE DC SENDS TO ROME 34 AND 19 OF THEM RESPECTIVELY. TRIESTE IS HOME FOR ON. BELCI AND THE VENETO BOASTS TWO MINISTERS (ANSELMI AND BISAGLIA). WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE PSI/PCI PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS IN VENICE AND TRIESTE, THE DC NOMINALLY HEADS ALL OTHER PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATIONS IN THE TWO REGIONS.

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MOST CITY GOVERNMENTS IN THE ARE REMAIN UNDER DC CONTROL.

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HOWEVER, THE PCI CONTINUES TO GAIN AND THE DC IN NUMEROUS CASES STAYS IN OFFICE AT PCI SUFFERANCE.

4. IN THE VENETO, DC DEPUTY AND REGIONAL SECRETARY MARINO CORDER HAS BEEN TASKED WITH PULLING THE REGIONAL PARTY ORGANIZATION BACK TOWARDS THE CENTER. HE SEEMS TO HAVE HAD SOME SUCCESS. IN A RECENT FAR-REACHING AND CANDID CONVERSATION WITH THE PRINCIPAL OFFICER, CORDER MADE NO BONES ABOUT HIS FANFANI PERSUASION. AS FOR THE EROSION OF DC STRENGTH IN THE WHITEST OF DC REGIONS, CORDER SAID THERE ARE NO FACILE EXPLANATIONS. HE POINTED TO THE DC CAPILLARY INDUSTRIAL MODEL--PLUS EVERY STEEPLE A FACTORY PLUS AS A FACTOR IN THE BREAKDOWN OF THE OLD INDUSTRIES AND THE OLD PARISHES, LEADING EVENTUALLY TO A BREAKDOWN OF THE OLD SYSTEM. HE FAVORS REFORM AND RENEWAL OF THE DC AS

LONG AS IT LEADS TOWARDS A MODERN LAY PARTY.

5. AS FOR PCI INROADS IN THE VENETO, CORDER FEELS THAT
THE COMMUNISTS HAVE REACHED THEIR HIGH WATER MARK, AND THAT
WHILE THEY MAY MAKE FURTHER GAINS THEY WILL DO SO ONLY
WITH GREAT DIFFICULTY. HOWEVER, HE POINTED OUT THAT UNTIL
SEVERAL YEARS ALL 92 COMMUNES IN TREVISO PROVINCE, FOR

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EXAMPLE, WERE IN DC HANDS; TODAY 15 ARE UNDER PCI CONTROL.
AS FOR HIS OWN VIEWS OF THE PCI, CORDER ACCEPTS CONFRONTO.
BUT HE SAYS HE GOES NO FARTHER. HE HAS NO FAITH IN THE PCI
WHICH HAS MANY SPOKESMEN BUT WHOSE REAL POSITION, HE SAYS,
IS THE ONE ADVOCATED BY LONGO.

6. WITH REGARD TO THE VENETO SOCIALISTS, CORDER WAS
OPTIMISTIC THAT THEY MIGHT RETURN TO COOPERATION WITH THE
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DC--A COOPERATION, HOWEVER, WHICH WOULD BE FAR DIFFERENT
FROM THE OLD ONE. HE NOTED THAT SUCH A MOVE REQUIRED A
QUADRIPTITE AGREEMENT BY MORO/FANANI AND DE MARTINO/
MANCINI TO PULL IT OFF. HOWEVER, THE PSI IS IN FERMENT
AND FOR THE TIME AT LEAST HE EXPECTED LITTLE COULD BE
DONE. MOEN.

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FM AMCONSUL TRIESTE

TO AMEMBASSY ROME

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 0617

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TRIESTE 0060

E.O.: 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, IT

SUBJ: THE DC STRONGHOLDS: THE VENETO AND

FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA

7. AMONG THE YOUNG VENETO DC LEADERS, THERE IS SOME DIS-
CONTENT AND FRUSTRATION. THEY ARE COMMITTED TO CHANGE AND
REFORM AND OPPOSE A DEAL WITH THE COMMUNISTS. SOME HAVE
GONE SO FAR AS TO SUGGEST THAT THE OLD DC LEADERS WILL TRY
TO HANG ON AT ANY COST INCLUDING SUCH A DEAL. AS FOR STRONG
DC LEADERS, BISAGLIA SEEMS TO BE EMERGING AS THE PARTICULAR
FAVORITE OF THE VENETO DC YOUNG. (BISAGLIA'S GRIT AND
APPEAL WILL BE TESTED APRIL 17 AT THE SPECIAL ROVIGO PRO-
VINCIAL ELECTIONS CALLED TO OVERCOME STALEMATE OF JUNE 15,
1975.) THEY SEE HIM AS A LEADER WHO HAS FOUGHT DURING HIS

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ENTIRE POLITICAL LIFE THE PCI IN HIS NATIVE CITY OF ROVIGO,
WHO KNOWS THE COMMUNISTS, AND WHO CAN BE COUNTED ON TO
REFUSE TO GOVERN WITH THEM.

8. GENERALLY, VENETO DC LEADERS SEEM CONFIDENT AND EVEN
OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE. ONE YOUNG VENICE DC LEADER
SAID THAT THE DC WOULD WELCOME EARLY ELECTIONS SINCE IT
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HAS NOTHING TO FEAR FROM THEM AND SOMETIME TO GAIN. AT
THE VENICE CITY AND PROVINCE LEVELS OF GOVERMENT, THE
DC SEEMS TO BE ENJOYING ITS OPPOSITION ROLE, TAKING A
REST, AND BENEFITTING FROM ITS RESPITE FROM POWER.

9. FOR THEIR PART, FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA DC LEADER ARE
ENGAGING IN A BIT OF HAND WRINGING. TRIESTE PROVINCE IS
NOW GOVERNED BY A PSI/PCI ALLIANCE AND TRIESTE DC MAYOR
SPACCINI IS BARELY HANGING ON TO HIS JOB IN CITY HALL.
THE PROBLEM HERE IS OSIMO WHICH ACCORDING TO LOCAL DC
LEADERS WILL LEAVE SCARS FOR SOME TIME TO COME. OUTSIDE
OF TRIESTE, THE PCI CONTINUES TO PRESS HARD WITH SOME
SUCCESS. IN VARIOUS SMALL COMMUNITIES, AGREEMENTS HAVE
BEEN REACHED AMONG THE PARTIES (INCLUDING THE DC BUT
MINUS THE MSI) WITH THE PCI. AS NOTED BY REGIONAL DC

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LEADERS, SUCH ARRANGEMENTS INVARIABLE LEAD TO THE
SUPPLANTING OF THE DC BY PSI/PCI ALLIANCES AS THE
GOVERNING FORCES.

10. LOCAL DC LEADERS READILY ADMIT THAT DC REVERSES ARE
DUE TO COMPLAISANCE AND WEARINESS AFTER 30 YEARS IN
POWER. BUT THEY SAY WIND FROM ROME IS ALSO BEING

FELT HERE. THEY SUPPORT CONFRONTO AND HAVE NO WISH TO GO FARTHER. THEY ARE NOT SO SURE ABOUT ROME. THEY ARE SENSITIVE TO THE SUCCESS OF THE PCI OFFENSIVE TO ISOLATE THE DC IN SMALLER FRIULI COMMUNITIES AND THE DC LEADERSHIP IS PARTICULARLY AWARE OF THE TENDENCY OF THE SMALLER LAY PARTIES TO SUPPORT OR AT LEAST NOT OPPOSE THE PCI EFFORT. IN FACT, THE LIBERALS (PLI) OF ALL PARTIES WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN HELPING THE PCI BRING DOWN THE DC-LED TRIESTE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT IN FEBRUARY.

11. NO LOCAL DC LEADER OFFERED ANY ADVISE FOR THE NEW US ADMINISTRATION, DEMURRING TO DO SO ON GROUNDS OF NOT WISHING TO INTERFERE IN US INTERNAL AFFAIRS. NEVERTHELESS

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LESS, ALL MADE THE POINT THAT US VIEWS AND ATTITUDES STILL CARRY GREAT WEIGHT IN ITALY.

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12. OBVIOUSLY, THEY SAY, THE US CANNOT INTERFERE IN ITALIAN INTERNAL MATTERS BUT AT THE SAME TIME IT CANNOT AFFORD TO APPEAR TO BE INDIFFERENT TO WHAT HAPPENS HERE. TO DO SO, WOULD ONLY BE A SIGNAL INVITING FURTHER DEFECTS FROM THE RANKS OF THE INDUSTRIALISTS, ETC. TO THE PCI, AND TO ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO MAKE THEIR PEACE WITH THE COMMUNISTS. US POLICY MUST BE CLEAR TO AVOID OUTCOMES UNWANTED AND UNWELCOME TO ALL CONCERNED.

13. IN THIS CONNECTION, DC FRIULI REGIONAL SECRETARY COLONI URGED STRONGLY THAT AMBASSADOR GARDNER MAKE THE FRIULI (AND THEN THE VENETO) HIS FIRST STOP IN ANY TRIPS OUTSIDE OF ROME. THE OBJECTIVES WOULD BE THERE: (A) underscore US SOLIDARITY MILLION DOLLAR AID PROGRAM IN THE EARTHQUAKE ZONE; (B) BOLSTER THE DC IN AN AREA WHERE IT STILL COMMANDS AND IS STRONG; AND (C) HAVE CANDID ON-THE-SPOT EXCHANGES OV VIEWS WITH LOCAL DC LEADERS ON US POLICY TOWARDS ITALY AS WELL AS WITH THE SMALLER LAY PARTIES WHICH SEEM INTENT ON PUNISHING THE DC.

14. COMMENT: IT IS CLEAR THAT THE DC GRIP ON THE VENETO

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AND THE FRIULI IS LOOSENING AND THAT THE PCI IS GAINING IN THE CRITICAL NORTHEAST AREA. MUCH OF THE CHANGE IS PROBABLY OF THEINEVITABLE VARIETY AS A RESULT OF THE DC'S 30 UNINTERRUPTED YEARS IN POWER AND THE CHANGES WROUGHT BY THE DC'S OWN PROGRAM TO CREATE AN INDUSTRIAL

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NORTHEAST. WHILE SOME ARE WONDERING HOW LONG THE DC CAN HANG ON, THE REAL QUESTION IS WHETHER THE DC CAN OVERCOME ITS OWN SELF INTEREST AND TO DO THE NECESSARY TO REFORM AND RENEW ITSELF. IN THE VENETO, THE STRONG CATHOLIC TRADITION COMBINES WITH THE ESSENTIALLY CONSERVATIVE AGRICULTURAL TRADITION INTO A FORMIDABLE OBSTACLE TO PCI AMBITIONS. OSIMO, THE EARTHQUAKE, AND THE DECLINE OF THE CITY OF TRIESTE MITIGATE AGAINST THE DC IN THE FRIULI. BUT THE DC RECORD IS GOOD HERE. THUS PCI HOPES FOR A NATIONAL GOVERNING ROLE WILL DEPEND ON WHETHER IT CAN NEUTRALIZE, ACCOMMODATE OR CO-OPT THE DC WHERE THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS STILL RUN THINGS. THE FIRST TESTS WILL BE SOON: A SPECIAL PROVINCIAL ELECTION APRIL 17 IN ROVIGO, THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN TRIESTE LATER THIS YEAR, AND THE FRIULI REGIONAL ELECTIONS IN 1978. MOEN.

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